

Water Resources Division Fisheries Program

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Natural Resource Program Center



Program Purpose:

Conserve native fishes, protect aquatic ecosystems and provide unique recreational fishing opportunities by providing technical assistance to parks, establishing servicewide fisheries policies, and supporting projects that restore species and habitats or collect data needed for science-based management.

Introduction

The National Park System includes diverse aquatic habitats located throughout the contiguous 48 states and Alaska as well as in Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. These habitats support many popular sportfish and harvestable shellfish as well as a diverse array of less well known nongame species.

Recreational Fishing

Recreational fishing is an important part of the heritage of the National Park System, and is an activity which has been available to visitors since the first park was established in 1872. National Park Service policies allow recreational fishing in those park units where it is authorized by federal law and in units where it is not specifically prohibited and does not interfere with the functions of natural aquatic ecosystems and riparian zones. Restrictions on fishing are limited to the minimum necessary to protect park resources and promote the safety and enjoyment of visitors and, when necessary, are imposed only after consultation with the adjoining state(s).

Fisheries resources and recreational fishing



Cache la Poudre River, Rocky Mountain National Park

opportunities exist in more than 170 of the 388 units of the National Park System, with more than 50 units incorporating freshwater, estuarine and marine resources. The fishing opportunities available within the National Park System represent much of the diversity found throughout the entire United States and its territories. Fishing is a popular activity among park visitors: recent estimates by the National Park Service Visitor Service and the American Sportfishing Association suggest that the National Park System supports more than 7.5 million user days of recreational fishing with an annual economic impact exceeding \$583 million.

A Heritage of Fishing – the NPS Recreational Fisheries Program

In 1992, the National Park Service adopted its recreational fisheries program, “A Heritage of Fishing”. Program purposes are to improve the management of fishery resources, improve public understanding of aquatic ecology and angler ethics, promote research into management of quality fisheries and the contribution of fish to ecosystem process, and increase the number and quality of recreational opportunities available to the public both inside and outside of the National Park System. This program established the framework for National Park Service to continue provide unique fishing opportunities while restoring and protecting native fishes and their associated ecosystems.

General Authorities and Limitations

Fisheries Management in the National Park System is directed by policy and guidelines with roots in legislation, including the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 (16 U.S.C. 1 et seq. [1988], Aug. 25, 1916 ch. 408, 39 Stat. 535) and the Redwood National Park Act (16 U.S.C. 79a-79q [1988], 82 Stat. 931, Pub. L. 90-545). The Organic Act directs the National Park Service to manage parks and monuments to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life there in and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” These general powers were broadened by the Redwood National Park Act in which

Congress directed the National Park Service to ensure that administration of the system “... not be exercised in derogation of the values and purposes for which these various areas have been established, except as may have been or shall be directly and specifically provided by Congress.”

Consistent with these broad authorities, fisheries management policies emphasize the restoration and conservation of natural assemblages of native species. Fish, like all park resources, are managed with an emphasis on preserving fundamental ecological processes, species and communities. Management priorities include the preservation or restoration of natural behavior, genetic diversity, and ecological integrity. Conservation of migratory or anadromous species that spend some portion of their life cycles outside NPS boundaries requires cooperation other agencies and adjacent landowners.

Sportfishing Regulations

National Park Units generally adopt the fishing regulations of the state or states within which they are located. However, the Organic Act grants the Secretary of the Interior the authority to implement rules and regulations as deemed necessary or proper for the use and management of the lands and waters under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Regulations may permit reasonable

A Heritage of Fishing Goals

- **Protect, restore and conserve fishery resources.**
- **Increase the quality, quantity, and diversity for recreational fishing opportunities.**
- **Improve partnerships between governments and the private sector for conserving and managing recreational fisheries.**
- **Identify and incorporate economic values and opportunities in developing recreational fisheries programs.**

use and enjoyment of the resource but should not compromise the productivity and sustainability of the fisheries, fish populations or aquatic ecosystems. The objectives of fishing regulations include maintaining biological balance and integrity as well as the quality of the fishing experience.

Areas inside park boundaries may be closed to fishing and other visitor uses to protect spawning and nursery areas, threatened and endangered species, or other fish populations from habitat loss or over fishing. Fishing tournaments and other competitive recreational fishing events are generally not compatible with the resource management goals and objectives of the National Park Service. Such events may be permitted only if the activity is clearly authorized for the park unit in which it will be held and will not result in any derogation of the values and purposes for which it was established.



Fly fishing in the Yellowstone River, Yellowstone National Park

Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing is allowed only where specifically authorized by federal law or treaty rights. When commercial fishing is authorized by Congress, the National Park Service must balance the allocation of the fishery resource with the needs of the aquatic ecosystem and must continue to provide the maintenance of self-sustaining fish populations and minimize the adverse effects on other natural resources. The National Park Service manages most commercial fishing under permit systems and imposes a reporting system on harvest inside park boundaries.

Native Species Restoration

In addition to providing recreation and, in some cases, an important source of food for subsistence fishermen, fish are important in the functions of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems in many National Park units. Unfortunately, many native fishes are threatened by past introductions of nonnative and exotic species, habitat loss, and poor water quality. In many cases these threats are the result of activities that occur outside park unit boundaries. Restoration of depleted fish stocks is a high priority for the National Park Service. Restoration efforts include native nongame fishes, especially those which are listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern, as well as those species which are valued by recreational fishermen. Providing for the recovery of native fishes may entail controlling or eradicating nonnative or exotic species, eliminating or modifying barriers to upstream spawning migration,



Endemic Salt Creek pupfish (Cyprinodon salinus), Death Valley National Park.

addressing water quality problems, and / or restoring habitats that are critical to specific life stages, particularly eggs and larvae. The development of new laboratory techniques for genetic analysis provides park managers with tools for the identification and restoration of endemic fish strains. These techniques, when integrated with fish culture, improve the chances of restoring native fishes in natural areas of parks.

Interagency Coordination

Cooperation and collaboration with state and local governments, as well as with other federal agencies, is critical to the long-term sustainability of fish populations in parks. Parks seek consistency in harvest regulations with the state when such consistency will achieve the fishery management goals of a park. Cooperative programs are also often needed where state management actions outside the park may influence or directly affect park stocks. Specifically the regulations of sport fishing and recreational use must be evaluated periodically, not only for inter-jurisdictional consistency, but also for assessment of their effectiveness in resource management. Such assessments must be coordinated with the monitoring of fish populations and collection of user or creel census data.



Nonnative species, including fish and crayfish, are a threat to the native fishes of the Green River in Dinosaur National Monument.

Fisheries Management Planning

Parks with waters supporting recreational, commercial, and / or subsistence fishing and parks with aquatic resources that are managed in cooperation with state fish and wildlife agencies are encouraged to develop fisheries management plans. Fisheries management plans are tailored to the needs of a specific park with content and format dependent upon the nature of the resources, current state of knowledge, key fisheries and

aquatic resource issues, and the nature of the relationships with other management agencies. Parks that share jurisdiction with other federal agencies, states or Tribal governments are encouraged to develop plans in cooperation with these entities. In general, fisheries management plans identify key resources issues, describe strategies for addressing these issues, establish desired future conditions, clarify roles and responsibilities of cooperating entities, establish priorities and list specific actions for achieving management goals.

Servicewide Fisheries Management Priorities

- **Basic inventories of fisheries and aquatic resources.**
- **Assessments of exotic species impacts.**
- **Identification and restoration of depleted stocks; restoration / protection of at-risk species.**
- **Monitoring and assessment of relationships between recreational, commercial and subsistence fishing and aquatic ecosystem health.**
- **Evaluation of effects of external activities and development of strategies to address activities with adverse impacts.**

For additional information:

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Photographs (in order): Fishermen in Voyageurs National Park (John Wulschleger); Eastern brook trout, Great Smokey Mountains National Park (Steve Moore); fisherman in Colonial National Heritage Park (John Wulschleger); green sea anemones, Olympic National Park (John Wulschleger); Rocky Mountain National Park (John Wulschleger); Yellowstone National Park (Melissa Trammell); Death Valley National Park (John Wulschleger); Dinosaur National Monument (John Wulschleger).